

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIMRITY 7236

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

USSOUTHCOM

AMCMNSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH

AMCONSUL CALI POUCH

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PINT, PINS, ETRD, ECON, CO

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL TURBAY IS ORGANIZING HIS CAMPAIGN SO AS TO ATTRACT BROAD-BASED SUPPORT. PRESIDENT LOPZ' MEETING WITH COLOMBIAN UNION LEADERS SHOULD TEMPORARILY EASE LABOR PRESSURES. THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES WILL CONVEY IN A SPECIAL SESSION ON APRIL 4 TO CONSIDER ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS. FORMER GENERAL ALVARO VALENCIA'S INDEPENDENT POLITICAL MOVEMENT WAS DAMAGED BY HIGH-LEVEL RESIGNATIONS AND CHARGES OF MALFEASANCE. THE PRESS CONTINUED TO PUBLICIZE CRITICISMS OF U.S. TRADE POLICIES. AN INFLUENTIAL FINANCIAL ADVISOR TO TURBAY INDICATED SUPPORT FOR THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATIONS'S ECONOMIC POLICIES. ANOTHER PROMINENT COLOMBIAN WAS ABDUCTED, APPARENTLY BY COMMON CRIMINALS. END SUMMARY.

2. TURBAY APPOINTS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION. LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL
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CANDIDATE TURBAY NAMED LEADERS OF HIS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION ALONG LINES GUARANTEED TO PROVIDE BROAD FACTIONAL AND GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION. IN ADDITION TO SEVERAL OF HIS MANY LONG TIME SUPPORTERS, THE "SOLE CHIEF OF THE PARTY AND OF THE CAMPAIGN" ALSO APPOINTED FORMER SUPPORTERS OF EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS AS WELL AS INDEPENDENTS. COMMENT: TURBAY SEEMS TO HAVE FORMED A UNIFIED CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE WHICH WILL MINIMIZE INTRA-PARTY

DIFFERENCES AND HAVE ACCESS TO POTENTIAL LIBERAL VOTERS OF ALL STRIPES. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, ALTHOUGH UNITED BEHIND CANDIDATE BETANCUR, IS STILL SHARPLY DIVIDED BETWEEN ITS PRO-GOVERNMENT ALVARO GOMEZ WING AND ITS ANTI-GOVERNMENT FACTION LED BY EX-PRESIDENT PASTRANA. IN MOST OF COLOMBIA, THEREFORE, BETANCUR'S CAMPAIGN MECHANISM WILL BE DIVIDED ORGANIZATIONALLY, BY ITS STANCE REGARDING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, AND BY STRONG PERSONAL ANIMOSITY BETWEEN THE TWO CONSERVATIVE FACTIONS.

3. LOPEZ REOPENS DIALOGUE WITH UNIONS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, IN A MEETING WITH HEADS OF COLOMBIA'S FOUR LABOR CONFEDERATIONS, ABANDONED HIS EARLIER INFLEXIBILITY AND AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO KEY LABOR DEMANDS, LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN FOR FURTHER TALKS. LOPEZ ACCOMPANIED BY KEY MINISTERS, ACCEPTED THE IDEA OF A GOVERNMENT-DECREED GENERAL WAGE INCREASE IN MAY AND GOVERNMENT COMPLIANCE WITH GOC-RATIFIED INTERNATIONAL TREATIES ON UNION FREEDOMS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING. THE PARTICIPANTS' FACES WERE WREATHED IN SMILES AS THEY LEFT THE MEETING. COMMENT: LOPEZ' LONG-WITHHELD AGREEMENT TO MEET WITH THE UNIONS AND HIS ENDORSEMENT OF THEIR DEMAND IN CONCEPT ARE PROBABLY AIMED AT CREATING A CLIMATE OF GOODWILL AND AVOIDING SERIOUS LABOR DISTURBANCES DURING THE CLOSING MONTHS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION. HIS OBSINATE REFUSAL TO TALK TO LABOR WAS A DIRECT CAUSE OF LAST YEAR'S GENERAL STRIKE. WHILE HIS ATTITUDE IS ENCOURAGING, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT HE WILL GO FAR TO MEET LABOR'S DEMANDS FOR A 50 PERCENT ACROSS-THE-BOARD WAGE BOOST. AS FOR THE TREATIES, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LEGISLATION WILL HAVE TO BE ADOPTED BY THE COLOMBIAN CONGRESS TO PERMIT COMPLIANCE, WHICH COULD BE A LENGTHY PROCESS.

4. SPECIAL CONGRESSIONAL SESSION FIXED. PRESIDENT LOPEZ SET APRIL 4, 5, AND 6 FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES WHICH WILL CONSIDER ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS, INCLUDING PAY RAISES FOR OFFICIAL EMPLOYEES. THE LIMITED SCOPE OF THE SESSION MEANS THAT OTHER PENDING ISSUES, SUCH AS NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY RATIFICATION AND THE CREATION OF A JUDICIAL POLICE GROUP TO ASSIST IN DRUG INTERDICTION, WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED BEFORE THE NEXT REGULAR CONGRESSIONAL SESSION IN JULY.

5. POLITICAL MOVEMENT SHAKEN BY RESIGNATIONS. THE MOVEMENT FOR NATIONAL RENEWAL, FOUNDED BY INDEPENDENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GENERAL (RETIRED) ALVARO VALENCIA TOVAR, WAS BADLY SHAKEN BY THE RESIGNATIONS OF THREE OF ITS TOP OFFICIALS. THE MOVEMENT'S NATIONAL COORDINATOR, OMAR BOTERO, DECLARED THAT HE WAS NO LONGER ABLE TO SUPPORT VALENCIA WHO ALLEGEDLY HAD SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH SUPPORTERS OF A BENEVOLENT DICTATORSHIP FROM COLOMBIA. BOTERO ALSO CHARGED THE MOVEMENT WITH UNETHICAL FINANCING METHODS AND CALLED FOR AN INVESTIGATION. VALENCIA DENIED THE CHARGES, MAINTAINING THAT IT WAS BOTERO WHO WAS GUILTY OF

MALFEASANCE, FOR WHICH HE HAD BEEN DISMISSED BY THE MOVEMENT'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. COMMENT: EMBASSY SOURCES CLOSE TO THE CAMPAIGN HAVE SAID THAT THE FORMER GENERAL SEEKS TO BUILD A NATIONAL IMAGE NOW IN ORDER TO MAKE A MORE SERIOUS RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN 1982. THE BOTERO INCIDENT MAY HAVE HURT VALENCIA'S SHORT-TERM PLANS.

6. CRITICISM OF U.S. TRADE POLICIES CONTINUES. BOGOTA'S MAJOR NEWSPAPER GAVE HEAVY PUBLICITY TO A REQUEST BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXPORTERS (ANALDEX) THAT PRESIDENT LOPEZ INTERVENE WITH THE U.S. CONCERNING THE THREAT OF NEW TRADE RESTRICTIONS. IN WHAT MAY BE PART OF A GENERAL CAMPAIGN, ANALDEX CHARGED THAT ANTICIPATED RESTRICTIONS ON IMPORTS OF LEATHER GOODS FROM COLOMBIA MAY NOT BE AN ISOLATED CASE, BUT COULD AFFECT ALL COLOMBIAN EXPORTS, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND LIMIT COLOMBIA TO BEING A SUPPLIER OF RAW MATERIALS ONLY. ANALDEX CONCLUDED THAT IF COLOMBIA CONTINUES TO ACCEPT U.S. HIGH-TECHNOLOGY GOODS, THE U.S. SHOULD ACCEPT COLOMBIAN TEXTILES, LEATHER GOODS, AND OTHER MANUFACTURES.

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7. TURBAY ADVISOR SUPPORTS GOVERNMENT POLICIES. THE PRESIDENT OF THE COLOMBIAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION AND PROBABLE FINANCE MINISTER IN A TURBAY GOVERNMENT, EDUARDO WEISNER, GAVE SOME INSIGHTS IN A RECENT SPEECH INTO HIS ECONOMIC THINKING ON THE PRESENT SITUATION. WEISNER REJECTED FOREIGN EXCHANGE LIBERATION, AND ADVISED THE MAINTENANCE OF THE DUAL EXCHANGE RATE AS LONG AS UNCERTAINTY OVER COFFE PRICES REMAINED. HE SUGGESTED NO CHANGES TO EXISTING MONETARY CONTROLS, BUT ADVISED THE ACCELERATIONS OF THE DEVALUATION TO STIMULATE MINOR EXPORTS IN 1979 WHEN WORLD COFFEE PRICES ARE EXPECTED TO BE BELOW PRESENT LEVELS. WHILE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR CONTROL OF INFLATION THIS YEAR, HE PLACED THE BATTLE AGAINST INFLATION AS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY. COMMENT: THE SPEECH REFLECTS WEISNER AS MUCH LESS A FREE-MARKET ECONOMIST THAN HE HAS BEEN IN THE PAST. PERHAPS HE WANTS TO SAVE FOR HIMSELF THE PLEASURE AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF DISMANTLING THE CONTROLS. HOWEVER, HE CLEARLY DOES NOT RELISH THE PROSPECT OF BECOMING MINISTER OF FINANCE WITH THE PESO ANY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MORE SIGNIFICANTLY OVERVALUED.

8. ANOTHER MAJOR KIDNAPPING HITS BOGOTA. SEVEN UNIDENTIFIED INDIVIDUALS KIDNAPPED MIGUEL DE GERMAN RIBON, A PROMINENT BOGOTA BUSINESSMAN AND FORMER COLOMBIAN AMBASSADOR TO PARIS. THE ABDUCTORS STOPPED RIBON'S CAR AS HE WAS DRIVING TO WOTK AND SPIRITED HIM OFF IN A STOLEN VEHICLE. NO RANSOM HAS YET BEEN DEMANDED, BUT THE INCIDENT IS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN THE WORK OF COMMON CRIMINALS WITHOUT POLITICAL MOTIVATION. COMMENT: IN ADDITION TO TAKING INCREASED PERSONAL SECURITY MEASURES, SOME WEALTHY COLOMBIANS HAVE TALKED ABOUT FORMING PAID VIGILANTE GROUPS TO RETALIATE AGAINST KIDNAPPERS. IT APPEARS, HOWEVER, THAT NO ACTION HAS BEEN TAKEN ON THIS IDEA. ASECIO

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